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ABSTRACT

Five child report measures were developed in order to gather systematic information about children's perceptions of themselves, their parents, and their families as a whole. The measures used a dialogue format, had parallel adult versions, and were designed for children's descriptive capacities. The five dialogues concerned (1) My Family and Friends; (2) What I Am Like and What I Think of Others in My Family; (3) What Is Important in My Family; (4) Ways to Get Chores Done in My Family; and (5) Ways My Family Helps Me with School. Preliminary descriptive findings for 100 children from an ongoing study of 500 families revealed that children's reports were a rich source of information about family life. Developmental, sex, and ethnic differences were found. The priority of family goals differed for children from single parent versus two parent homes. Of special methodological interest were analyses relating the child ratings of how good he or she feels when interacting with each parent to (1) parent ratings, (2) direct observations of behavior patterns, and (3) types of affect, especially positive affect, expressed within the family as a whole. Discussion focuses on the potential of combining child report with direct observation to specify behavioral components associated with "successful" family and child outcomes. (RH)

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Dialogues with Children: The Child as Reporter for Family and Self

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1. Objectives: (a) to develop methods for eliciting valid and reliable reports from children (ages 5 to 12) about themselves and their families and (b) to develop strategies for converging data derived from subjective and objective sources. (Note: this is part of an ongoing study of 500 middle class, white and black families being conducted at the University of Washington.)

2. Introduction: Five instruments were developed to provide systematic information about how children perceive themselves, their parents, and their families as a whole. These measures were designed and piloted for use in the first year with a heterogeneous group of more than 65 children, 6 to 12 years of age, from different family types. The tools were developed as an integral part of an ongoing University of Washington Family Behavior Study directed by Drs. Sharon Landesman and James Jaccard. The Family Behavior Study seeks to understand the effects of family configuration (number, age, gender, and relatedness of all family members) on family functioning and child outcome. The conceptual model guiding this research emphasizes (1) the contribution of four major elements: goals, resources (social and nonsocial), individual life histories, and decision-making (problem solving) strategies; and (2) the need for a contextual analysis of the family as a unit, with the views and behavior of all family members taken into account (Landesman, Jaccard, & Gunderson, in press).

This set of child instruments has been designed for use in research. Each utilizes a dialogue format to maximize the child's attention, interest, and comprehension. This is based on the research recommendations of Borkowski, Reid, & Kurtz, 1984; Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, & Campione, 1983; and Vygotsky, 1978. Each instrument is relatively brief to administer, with the longest assessment averaging 12 minutes. Although the tools were developed for children 6 to 12, we have used them successfully with children as old as 16 years. Additionally, each child measure has a corresponding adult (parent) version

available. (Note: a self-administered format and versions for preschoolers and developmentally delayed/mentally retarded children are being tested now.)

3. The 5 tools are:

a. WHAT I AM LIKE AND WHAT I THINK ABOUT OTHERS IN MY FAMILY

PART A. WHAT AM I LIKE?

A child's self-description on 10 behavioral qualities (ranking and rating)

PART B. WHAT IS _____(MOTHER, FATHER, OTHER) LIKE?

A child's evaluation of each other family member on the same 10 behavioral qualities (ranking and rating)

b. MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS

(1) the child's perception of the people in his or her everyday life who provide different types of social, emotional, instrumental, and informational support; and

(2) the child's satisfaction with the different types of support offered by each of these people (i.e., how helpful)

c. WHAT IS IMPORTANT IN MY FAMILY

PART A. WHAT I THINK IS IMPORTANT FOR FAMILIES

A child's ranking and rating of the importance he or she assigns to five broad family goals-- basic care providing, societal functioning, character-moral development, education/learning, and within family relationships

PART B. WHAT _____(MOTHER, FATHER, OTHER) THINKS IS IMPORTANT FOR FAMILIES

A child's evaluation of the importance that each other family member assigns to the above family goals.

d. WAYS TO GET CHORES DONE IN MY FAMILY

A child's report of strategies used to encourage him/her to be helpful at home

e. WAYS MY FAMILY HELPS ME WITH SCHOOL

A child's report of what parents and other family members do to encourage him/her to do well in school

Psychometric data and descriptive findings will be presented here on the first three instruments only.

4. Brief Description of the first three instruments:

a. WHAT I AM LIKE AND WHAT I THINK ABOUT OTHERS IN MY FAMILY

Part A. WHAT AM I LIKE? involves showing the child a deck of 10 cards, each depicting a different behavioral quality, and asking the child to select the card which describes him/her the best (rank order = 1), the next best (rank order = 2), etc. The last card selected (rank order = 10) depicts a quality the child thinks describes him/her the least well. The instructions provide an opportunity to be certain the child understands the task. (Note: these 10 qualities were those mentioned most frequently by parents as qualities they liked in their children, during an intensive study of 50 heterogeneous families in the greater Seattle area in 1985. These qualities then were studied in terms of very young children's abilities to understand the terms, using another cohort for pilot testing of the child instruments.) Next, the examiner probes the child about "how much" he or she thinks he or she has each behavioral quality or shows that particular trait, following the order in which the behaviors were ranked by the child, compared to other young people of the same age. The child uses a special barometer with a moving level indicator for this rating task. (see table 1 for a list of the behavioral qualities)

Table 1

WHAT I AM LIKE AND WHAT I THINK OF OTHERS IN MY FAMILY

Eager to Learn: "I really like to learn"

Responsible: "You can count on me to get the job done"

Loving: "I love and care"

Honest: "I tell the truth"

Independent: "I can do things on my own"

Sensitive: "I know how people feel inside"

Creative: "I can do things in new ways"

Self-Confident: "I like myself (me)"

Happy: "I am happy"

Cooperative: "I am a good helper"

Part B. WHAT IS MY _____(MOTHER, FATHER, OTHER) LIKE? is constructed in parallel fashion to the above. The examiner asks the child to rank, then rate, another family member on the same set of 10 behavioral traits, relative to others of a similar role (e.g. "compared to other mothers").

This tool for self-description and family member description provides an opportunity to assess a child's subjective view of his or her particular strengths or weaknesses, as well as those of other family members. The tool yields an overall summary score of the child's positive appraisal of self and family members, as well as more detailed behavioral profiles. Because a parallel parent measure is available for a parent to describe him or herself and for the parent to describe the child, discrepancies in perceptions may be studied. Another strategy for summarizing the child and parent behavioral description tools is to evaluate how strongly a child identifies with

each parent in terms of having similar behavioral traits, and vice versa. This tool also is compatible with other instruments from the Family Behavior Study that tap both children's and parents' goals, values, and/or preferences for certain types of behavior. For example, parents indicate how important they feel it is for their child to have each of the 10 behavioral traits. These ratings may be used to generate a weighted profile for their child, in which their child having highly valued qualities assumes greater positive value, while lacking these very important qualties is weighted more negatively.

b. MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS assesses (a) the child's perceptions of the people in his or her everyday life who provide support and (b) the child's satisfaction with different types of support offered by each of these people. The instrument dimensionalizes support into four primary areas: instrumental, informational, companionship, and emotional. The task begins by asking the child to name family members, relative(s), friend(s), and a teacher. These names are written on a set of cards. The child then is presented with a series of questions about various aspects of social support, such as "If you did something that you felt really bad about, that no one knew about, who would you talk to?" In response to each question, the child uses the cards to indicate the order in which he or she would go to each of the people, i.e. first, second, third... After this ranking task, the interviewer next has the child use a special barometer (with a moving level indicator) to rate how satisfied he or she usually feels after that particular type of interaction with each person. For example, "When you talk to your brother when you feel 'bad,' how much better do you feel?" The child sets the barometer to show "how much" he or she has a particular feeling (e.g. "better," "happy"). The task ends with a

brief inventory of the other people, in addition to those mentioned above, who are important to the child, including the person's age and role, frequency seen, and types of shared activities.

The instrument consists of two segments of six questions each. Part 1 and Part 2 are administered either on two separate sessions or during a single sesion with a break of at least 10 minutes. Each part takes approximately 10 to 12 minutes to administer. The format can be expanded, however, to probe additional support questions related to a specific research question or to include a wider array of friends or individuals.

The results are summarized in terms of (1) who the child turns to for instrumental, emotional, informational, and companionship types of support, (2) the child's perception of how often he or she receives each type of support from each person, and (3) how satisfied he or she is with the type of interaction for each person. Further summary measures include a combined (total) level of satisfaction with each type of support (regardless who provides the support) and an overall qualitative summary score for each person in the network (summing satisfaction for each person across the four types of support). If the investigator chooses to use the parallel measure for parents, then discrepancy scores can be computed between the child's and each parent's perception of the child's functional social network. Similarly, siblings can be compared in terms of their agreement re: each parent's effectiveness in providing each type of support to them.

c. WHAT IS IMPORTANT IN MY FAMILY assesses the child's impressions of the importance of 5 major domains of family functioning: character development, attention to basic needs, relationships within the family, education and training, and societal functioning. The dialogue begins

by talking with the child about a set of picture cards depicting each of the 5 areas of family functioning. The examiner then asks the child to arrange these from the most to the least important, according to his or her own opinion; then according to his or her perception of his or her mother's and/or father's opinion. After each rank ordering task, the child then uses the special barometer to indicate exactly how important he or she thinks this goal is for families.

5. Test-Retest Reliability and Preliminary Results

a. WHAT I AM LIKE AND WHAT I THINK OF OTHERS IN MY FAMILY

1. Test-Retest correlations (across items) for the child's Overall Positive Appraisal of Self (0.63), Mother (0.86), and Father (0.79) are in Table 2.

Table 2

Child Dialogue Instrument:

WHAT I AM LIKE AND WHAT I THINK OF OTHERS IN MY FAMILY

Test-Retest correlations, means, and standard deviations of the child's overall positive appraisal of self, mother, and father on a list of 10 behavioral characteristics at time 1 and time 2.

	for self	for mother	for father
test-retest correlations	0.63	0.86	0.79
	p = .001	p = .001	p = .001

Cumulative ratings for 10 behavioral characteristics (rated from -50 to +50, 0 = neutral). Children rated their parents higher on these behavioral qualities than they did for themselves.

Time 1			
M	71.15	109.70	104.35
SD	(49.93)	(70.42)	(71.98)
Time 2			
M	73.95	90.55	101.71
SD	(67.19)	(70.42)	(71.98)

2. Test-Retest (within subjects) when plotted by age and IQ, showed that the reliability of the ratings was positively related to IQ (significance of R = 0.03) such that children with higher IQs were more reliable in their ratings. The reliability of the rankings was significantly related (R = 0.002) to child's age. The older children were more reliable in their rankings from time 1 to time 2 than were the younger children.
3. Probability estimates of children's rankings were calculated using a modification of the conservative Kappa statistic. The children were the most reliable with the first and last items ranked. They were significantly less reliable with the items they ranked in the middle. (see figures 1, 2, & 3)

Figure 1

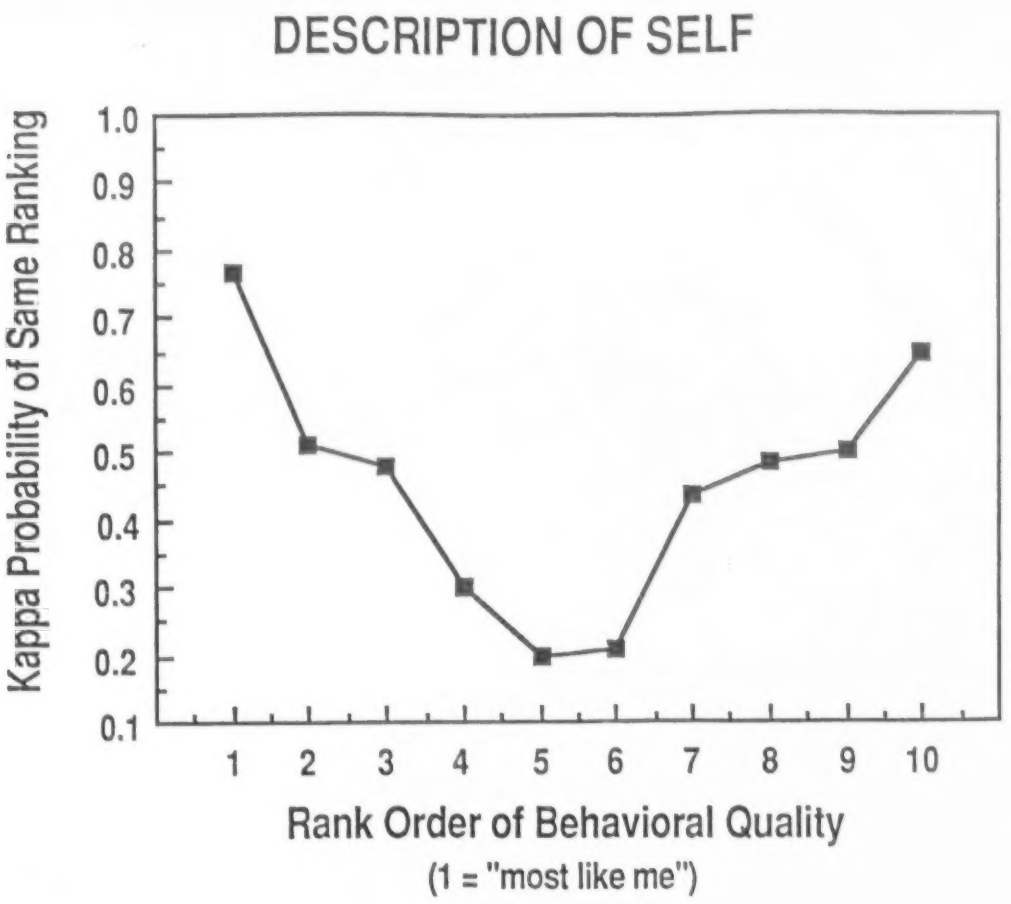


Figure 2

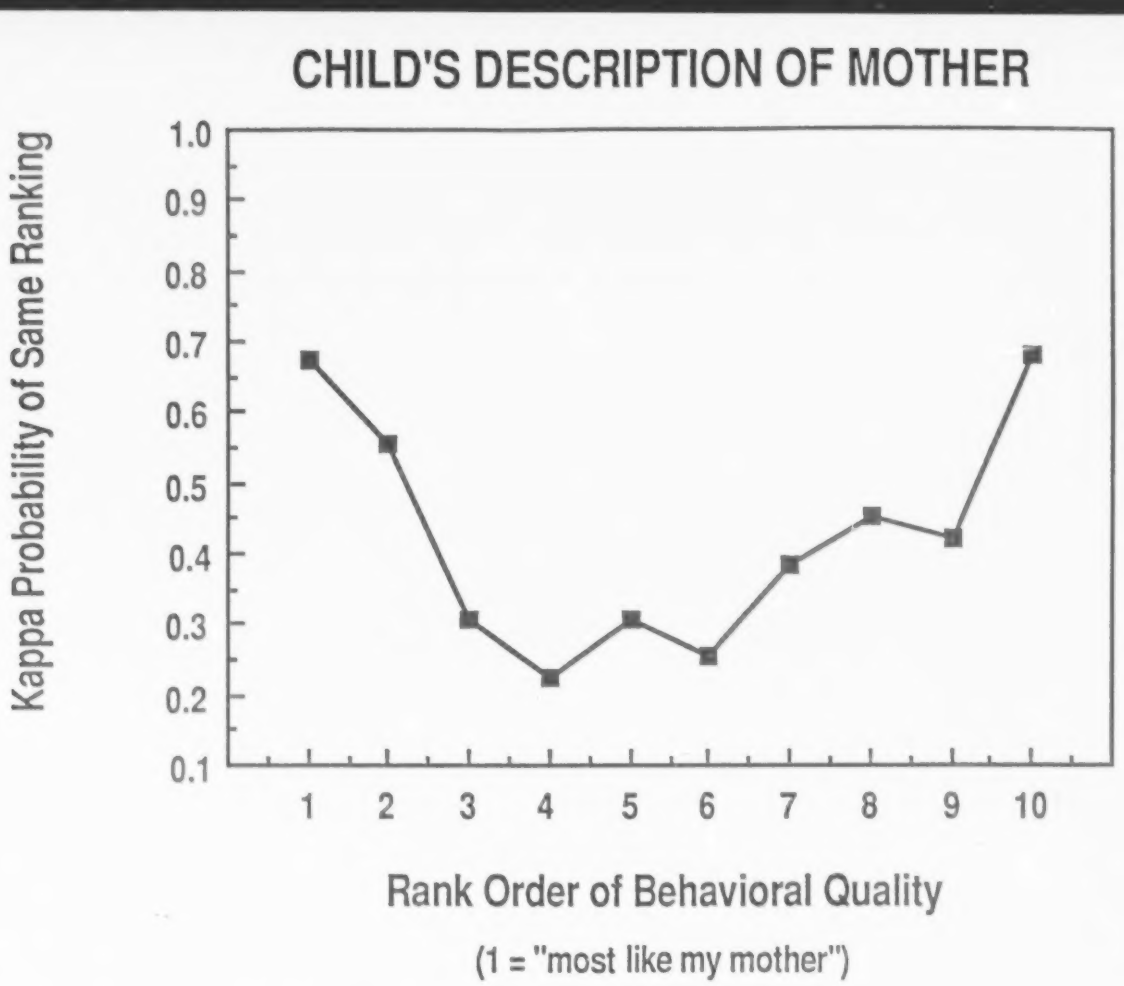
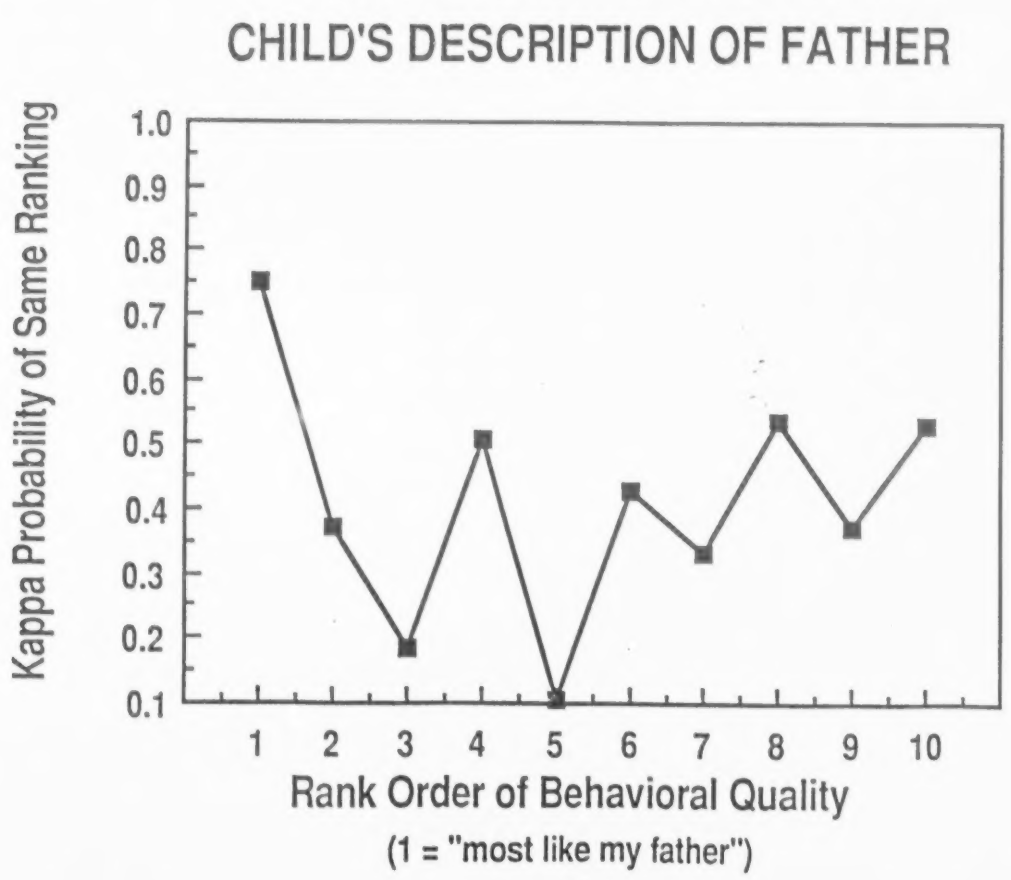


Figure 3



individual qualities in this test revealed good comprehension and differentiation (e.g., responsibility, creativity, lovingness). The two qualities most often used by the child to describe him or herself were "eager to learn" and "creative." The two qualities most often used to describe the mother were "loving" and "responsible." The father was most frequently described as "loving" and "creative." Interestingly, the behavioral examples given by children for "what mom does that is loving" and "what dad does that is loving" reflect differences in behaviors children rely on to indicate parental qualities. (see tables 3 & 4)

Table 3

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF

"WHAT I AM LIKE AND WHAT I THINK OF OTHERS"

I KNOW MY FATHER IS LOVING BECAUSE...

he hugs and kisses us a lot (physical affection) 32.3%

he buys me special things (gifts) 16.2%

he likes to be with me or do things with me (companionship) 12.9%*

he helps me when I need it (instrumental support) 12.9%

he does or makes special things for me (special attention) 9.7%

he tells me he loves me (verbal expression) 9.7%

he makes things safe for us (protector) 3.2%*

*These items are not found on the instrument for the mother.

Table 4

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF

"WHAT I AM LIKE AND WHAT I THINK OF OTHERS"

I KNOW MY MOTHER IS LOVING BECAUSE...

she takes care of me (or others) and lets me do what I want (permissive caring) 17.3%*

she kisses and hugs me (physical expression) 16.4%

she is always cheerful, just loves me (loving personality) 15.5%*

she tells me she loves me (verbal expression) 12.7%

she listens to me (and others), makes me feel better, and helps me with problems (emotional support) 10.9%*

she takes care of me when I get hurt or sick (nursing) 9.1%*

she yells at me for good reasons and tries to keep me safe, healthy, and out of trouble (caring vigilance) 6.4%*

she helps me when I need it (instrumental help) 5.5%

she buys me things (special attention) 3.6%

*These items are not found on the instrument for the father.

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5. Preliminary descriptive findings (N = 100) include significant differences as a function of child's age, sex and family type (single- vs. two-parent).

child's age

a. Younger children (ages 6 to 9), in constrast to older children (ages 10 to 12), rated their mothers as more "loving." The older group of children rated their fathers as significantly more "loving" and more "sensitive" than did the younger children.

b. The discrepancies between the child's ratings of self and the child's rating of mother and father were calculated to evaluate how strongly each child identifies (i.e. less discrepancy

indicates greater identity) with each parent in terms of having similar behavioral traits. Older children, in comparison to younger children, were found to rate themselves as being more similar to their fathers. No significant differences were found between older and younger children in their ratings of similarity with mothers.

child's sex

a. No significant differences were found between the sexes in children's perceptions of themselves on the individual behavioral characteristics (i.e. loving, eager to learn). Additionally, there were no significant differences found between boys' and girls' ratings of their mothers. However, significant differences were found between boys' and girls' ratings of their fathers. Boys rated their fathers higher than girls did on a number of characteristics. Specifically, fathers received higher ratings from sons on the qualities of "happy," "eager to learn," "cooperative," "honest," and "responsible" than they did from daughters.

b. Boys' overall appraisal of their fathers (summed over all qualities) (M 155) was significantly greater than girls overall appraisal (M 92)of their fathers. (see table 5)

Table 5

CHILDREN'S OVERALL APPRAISAL OF THEIR FATHERS

Boys	Girls
155*	92*

*Mean cumulative ratings for 10 behavioral characterstics (rated from -50 to +50).

family type (single- vs two-parent)

The discrepancy between the child's rating of self and his or her rating of mother was calculated for children from both single- and two-parent homes. Children from single-parent homes were found to rate themselves significantly more similarly to their mothers on the list of behavior characteristics than children from two-parent homes.

b. MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS

1. The test-retest correlations for children's rankings of family and network members who provide support have a mean value of 0.60, median of 0.80. (see table 6)

Table 6

Child Dialogue Instrument:

MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Test-Retest correlations of the rank ordering of network members that the child goes to for support

	Correlations of the Child's Rank Ordering of "Whom" He or She Goes to for Support at Time 1 and Time 2					
type of support	mother	father	sibling	friend	relative	teacher
Informational	.51	.78	.41	.88	.28	.80
Instrumental	.39	.74	.50	.88	.80	.62
Companionship	.78	.86	.36	.45	.68	.97
Emotional						
general feelings	.54	.60	.28	.80	.63	.44
happy	.20	.40	.84	.29	.49	.58
upset	.76	.73	.55	.75	.73	.48

2. The test-retest correlations for children's ratings of support satisfaction have a mean value of 0.56 and median value of 0.60. (see table 7)

Table 7

Child Dialogue Instrument

MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Test-Retest correlations for the child's ratings (50 point scale) of support with the members in his or her network

Correlations of the Child's Ratings of Support Satisfaction with Network Members at Time 1 and Time 2

type of support	mother	father	sibling	friend	relative	teacher
Informational	.61	.60	.66	.75	.63	.82
Instrumental	.55	.30	-.03	.89	.27	.84
Companionship	.25	.42	.52	.33	.68	.55
Emotional						
general feelings	.59	.68	.39	.60	.36	.52
happy	.61	.83	.65	.65	.66	.66
upset	.70	.80	.43	.47	.29	.45

3. Preliminary descriptive findings (N = 100) include significant differences as a function of child's age, sex, and family type (single- vs. two-parent).

child's age

a. Older children, compared to younger children, rate "talking to Dad about feelings" as significantly more satisfying.

b. Younger children rate themselves as "having more fun with their teachers" than older children.

child's sex

a. Boys, in contrast to girls, rate "talking to Dad about

feelings," "asking Dad for help," and "going to Dad to have fun," as significantly more satisfying.

b. Boys also rate "talking to your teacher about your feelings," as significantly more satisfying than girls do.

family type

Children from single-parent homes, in contrast to children from two-parent homes, rate "going to mom to share something good that has happened," as significantly more satisfying.

c. WHAT IS IMPORTANT IN MY FAMILY

Test-retest correlations for children's ratings of the importance of each family goal have a mean value of 0.61, and a median value of 0.66. (see table 8)

Table 8

Child Dialogue Instrument

WHAT IS IMPORTANT IN MY FAMILY

Test-Retest correlations for child's ratings (50 point scale) of the importance of each goal to him or herself, and the child's judgement of the importance of each goal to mother and father.

Correlations of the Child's Ratings of the Importance of Each Goal to Self and Other Family Members at Time 1 and Time 2

Family Goal Areas	Self	Mother	Father
basic care-providing	.76	.74	.83
societal functioning	.55	.16	.53
education/ learning	.75	.66	.47
character-moral development	.78	.54	.68
within family relations	.51	.54	.66

6. Strategies for using the instruments to study families include

   a. computing similarities and dissimilarities between child, sibling, and parent perceptions;

   b. summarizing child and parent reports to create family profiles, N = 1; and

   c. combining (a) child report data with (b) data from objective sources (i.e. behavioral observations) to (c) predict long term positive relationships in families. (see table 9)

Table 9

CHILDREN'S RATINGS OF SELF AND PARENTS

1. Children in single-parent homes rate themselves as more like mothers than do children in two-parent homes.

2. Older children describe their behavioral qualities in ways that are more like father's behaviors than mother's; also, ratings of fathers become more positive.

3. Boys and girls do not differ in self-esteem or perceived behavioral traits; sons do provide higher appraisal of fathers than do daughters.